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Book SECTION

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GENEVA ACCORD

By John Whitman. Crown. 278 pp. \$14.95

WITH THE recent agreement to resume arms control talks between the United States and the Soviet Union, this first novel, an espionage thriller set against the SALT II talks of the late '70s, takes on a special immediacy. The author, who himself participated as the CIA representative in Geneva, communicates an intimate knowledge not only of the technicalities of arms negotiation—tradeoffs on ICBMs, verification safeguards, and such exotic concepts as telemetry encryption—but also of the shifting emotions and complex interplay of personalities. At the beginning, the participants are tense and grim, the Americans in particular "like monks arriving for services in a bare chapel." By the end, with the agreement signed, there is "decorous pandemonium," with champagne and tears shared by men who habitually perceive each other with deadly distrust.

The politics of *Geneva Accord* are moderately liberal but passionately pro-arms control, which leaves the plot in a curious bind: since SALT II was not ratified by the Senate and

was sabotaged by "right-wingers of various stripes" (Ronald Reagan being referred to only as "a powerful opposition candidate"), the novel is obliged to conclude with an ambivalent, nervous epilogue. When George Inigo, the CIA protagonist who goes to dangerous lengths to make SALT II succeed, tries to console himself that there will eventually be a "SALT Six" or "SALT Eleven," his colleague asks what they do in the meantime. The answer: "In the meantime we can all love our wives," at which point both leave for home early "just in case the world blows up tonight."

The main story about SALT II is expertly managed, but it must be admitted that the espionage elements—including counterintelligence plots, illegal defections, and a love story involving a beautiful East German scientist of ambiguous loyalties—are rather routine, with little tension or suspense. Nevertheless, the SALT II scenario provides drama enough, and John Whitman may have hit upon an important species of thriller in which the stakes are the fate not of this or that agent or even country but of the human race.